

University of Washington
School of Art
Visual Communication Design
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art

Degree Requirements

Graduate Seminar	20
Graduate Studio	25
Thesis	10
Art History	15
Electives	20

Credits required for degree: 90

The University of Washington Visual Communication Design program educates designers to be active participants in the production of visual culture via thoughtful solutions to communication problems in printed and digital media.

The graduate program in Visual Communication Design is a two-year course of advanced study for a small group of students that leads to an MFA degree. The core curriculum is comprised of studio courses, seminars and independent study and proceeds thematically according to a series of key issues that define each quarter. Students must enroll in the graduate seminar during the first four quarters of study and the graduate studio for the first five quarters of study.

Seminars meet once per week and address critical issues in design through research, writing, presentation and discussion. Studio courses meet twice per week and are intended to compliment and extend work done in seminars—providing a means for applying related ideas and influences in the context of design projects. Studio projects are appropriate to the graduate level and encourage individual responses to open-ended questions. Projects may be experimental, research-oriented, educational or pragmatic, but remain directly relevant to the discipline of design. Students are encouraged to define personal areas of interest that connect throughout the sequence and ultimately relate to their thesis.

Students also work closely with faculty to identify additional course work that corresponds to their needs and objectives. These courses often draw on the significant resources of the undergraduate program. In the final two quarters of study, degree candidates produce a substantial thesis project which is publicly exhibited at the Henry Art Gallery.

About the Thesis Project

Graduate thesis projects have covered a wide range of topics and reflect both the interests of the student and the concerns of the program for forward-looking investigations into the professional, technological and social questions facing design. Students are encouraged to utilize the significant resources of the university to further their interests while extending the influence of design into the larger community.

Recent projects have included interactive learning tools for middle school students in math and science, an exploration in dynamic information design via a collaboration with UW Fisheries scientists, a critical synthesis and analysis of contemporary visual theory, a polemic visual interface intended to minimize media bias in news reporting, and a comprehensive critique of information delivery across media at a major museum, among others.

/autumn/

1 Art 581 (5cr)
Graduate Seminar 1: Theory + Criticism
Addresses contemporary theory and criticism from a variety of perspectives—either from within design practice and education or from related disciplines. Repeated in the second year.

Art 582 (5cr)
Graduate Studio 1: Critical Practice
Encourages a critical dialog about design through independent studio projects—building a link between theory and practice. Students engage independent projects in a complex, more conceptually rigorous way than is often required in undergraduate education or professional practice. Repeated in the second year.

Electives/Art History (5-8cr)

/winter/

Art 581 (5cr)
Graduate Seminar 2: Professional Practice
Addresses issues of professional practice recognizing that design is a problem-solving activity undertaken with a responsibility to both client and audience. Content may include ethics, models of practice, case studies, etc.

Art 582 (5cr)
Graduate Studio 2: Society
Explores design as a cultural practice and attempts to engage public needs through the identification and solution of applied design problems. Students work individually and cooperatively to address issues and opportunities. Repeated in the second year.

Electives/Art History (5-8cr)

/spring/

Art 581 (5cr)
Graduate Seminar 3: Technology
Addresses theoretical and critical issues associated with emerging technologies and their impact on society, culture and visual communication design.

Art 582 (5cr)
Graduate Studio 3: Technology
Explores theoretical and pragmatic issues associated with time-based digital media in the context of ideas introduced in the prior two quarters. Students develop independent projects in response to faculty direction.

Electives/Art History (5-8cr)

2 Art 581 (5cr)
Graduate Seminar 4: Theory + Criticism
Addresses theory and criticism from a variety of perspectives—either from within design practice and education or from related disciplines. Content changes annually.

Art 582 (5cr)
Graduate Studio 4: Critical Practice
Encourages a critical dialog about design through independent studio projects—building a link between theory and practice. Students engage independent projects in a complex, more conceptually rigorous way than is often required in undergraduate education or professional practice.

Electives/Art History (5-8cr)

Art 582 (5cr)
Graduate Studio 5: Society
Explores design as a cultural practice and attempts to engage public needs through the identification and solution of applied design problems. Students work individually and cooperatively to address issues and opportunities.

Art 700 (5cr)
Graduate Thesis 1
The thesis is an opportunity to enrich the field of design with an original contribution. It may exist as a written document, designed artifact, environmental exhibit, multimedia presentation or any combination of the above. Each student is responsible for developing a proposal during the Autumn Quarter and organizing a thesis committee. The committee must consist of at least two faculty, one of whom is the Chair. Students work closely with their Chair and committee throughout the project.

Electives/Art History (5-8cr)

Art 700 (5cr)
Graduate Thesis 2
Continuation and execution of work begun in the Winter Quarter. The final project is publicly exhibited in a group show near the end of the quarter. Students also provide written and visual documentation of their work.

Electives/Art History (5-8cr)